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# THE CHILD-MIND AND CHILD-RELIGION

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## II. THE NATURE OF CHILD CONSCIOUSNESS

It is becoming more and more evident to the present generation that profession, in any way, of an interest in humanity, carries with it an interest in childhood. As set forth in the preceding article[1] this is a crucial fact in conserving the life of the race and in making possible a consistent advance. Any belief in religion as a profound fact of race-life has bound up in it a regard for perfecting the spiritual life of children. It is a healthful habit that is possessing the minds of students and workers to approach their larger problems in a concrete way instead of in the abstract and in general. Ideals are the realest of all real things, but to attain them involves doing the specific thing in an intelligent way. It is well to glow over the ideal of a perfected humanity. It is better, while inspired with the vision of it, to gain some insight, if possible, into some of the ways of making it actual. There is no human race apart from the individuals that compose it, nor any human progress apart from growing persons, any more than there is a foot race without the contestants who take part in it. He who has an abstract faith in an abstract human progress, unless he be a mere dependent, without putting forth the simple effort to rear healthy children and perfect himself, is like a person who would pay the entrance fee and sit out his time watching an imaginary race at a course on which none of the contestants appear. Or to change the figure, there can be no body of adults great in mind and heart unless they have grown from right-minded children, any more than there can be an orchard bearing luscious fruit unless proper regard has first been taken for the seed and tiny trees. A thousand years of cultivation of mature specimens could never produce a seedless prune nor a spineless cactus. Those who have at heart the coming of the perfected life of humanity have spent too much time in cultivating old gnarled orchards and too little in breeding and rearing the seedlings which are themselves to *be* the beauty and truth and righteousness for which we hope and of which we dream. It is no exaggeration to say that infancy is the most vital spot in the growing life of the race.

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[1] *Biblical World*, July, 1907.

This is a simple truth, but one to which men and women were almost entirely blind until the days of Herder, Darwin, and Fiske, and, in education, until Pestalozzi, Herbart, and Froebel. The appreciation of the significance of childhood has been contemporaneous with the establishment of Sunday schools and a heightened interest in "secular" education. This first stage of the problem, that of a recognition of the crucial importance of childhood, has been safely passed. We are at the present time in the midst of its second phase, viz., the full understanding of the fact that *children are different from adults* and, to that extent, must have a different regimen.

The fact of the unlikeness of children and mature persons may be passed over hastily for the reason that it is so fully treated in the literature of child-life. Dr. Oppenheim, for example, in his valuable book, *The Development of the Child*, has devoted two long chapters to describing the contrasts between children and adults in bodily characteristics, and to showing that in no proper sense is the child an adult in miniature. In many respects they are as unlike as if they belonged to entirely different species. Children are toothless, sexless, without cerebral elements for co-ordination, lacking in most of the finer or accessory mechanisms for movement, having many glands dormant that will afterward function, possessing others that will afterward be absorbed, and so on through an extended catalogue. The mental unlikenesses are equally great and fully as numerous. Children are sensori-motor in mental furnishing, are largely dominated by a few primitive instincts, are controlled by appetites and passions, are crudely imaginative, are at once credulous and skeptical, and in general the centers of organization of their personalities are other than with their elders. These differences are sufficiently appreciated to have brought about already marked changes in methods of instruction and in the selection of material that will be the proper food for children of various ages.

The readjustments in this respect have been as rapid as is wholesome. There is so little known, as yet, about the inner mental and spiritual life of children that radical changes in methods and subject-matter might be equivalent to the substitution of one set of errors for another. This feeling has ushered in the third and more important phase of the problem, viz., what are the *essential respects* in which children differ from adults? In other words, the question has come to be a distinctly psychological one, that of rightly interpreting the nature of the mental life of children, just as medicine has become fundamentally a matter of physiology and chemistry, and horticulture one of botany and organic chemistry.

By the help of the collective results of comparative psychology and child-study, we are to try, in this article, to gain an insight into some of the likenesses and differences between the mental life of children and adults. We shall notice first some of the essential characteristics they possess in common, some of which, at first thought, will seem to be differences.

1. It has often been stated, for example, even by high authorities, that children are passive and later develop the power of voluntary control. "In the new-born babe," says Mr. Drummond, "there is no appearance of volition, but as the child grows the will appears very gradually." On the contrary, it seems truer to say, and that without sophistry and without a free and easy use of the term "will," that children from the earliest days manifest the power of volition as strongly as do their elders. Preyer agrees with the sentiment just quoted, and believes that willed acts take place only after the first three months. The difficulty is with an artificial criterion of the presence of volition. "Every willed movement is preceded by ideas, is previously known in the experience of the one who executes it, has an aim, and may be inhibited by other ideas." This definition makes, as Irving King has pointed out, an impassable gap between earlier and later forms of activity, for example, between voluntary and imitative activity. Those, also, who, like Baldwin, make the criterion of willed acts the presence of an imitation of an external "copy," or something internal arising in its own memory, imagination, or thought, seem to have made an artificial separation of willed and instinctive acts. Under this conception the will must spring up at about the third month entirely *de novo*, or must arise out of something entirely unlike itself, viz., acts performed at first wholly mechanically. Such a con-

ception genetic psychology, which tries to preserve the unity and continuity of life, cannot consistently entertain. It is fairer to define the will as the power of consciousness to focalize upon any object of interest or desire. This point of view saves the continuity of the developmental process and includes under a single term, aspects of consciousness that cannot be separated by their descriptive features. In the sucking act, for instance, the complete abandon of the mental life of the baby to its object and its entire focalization upon it is not unlike, in the essential characters that concern the will, the behavior of a savage in the chase or of an architect in planning a house. There are vital differences, to be sure, which it shall be our business presently to specify. It is not at all illuminating to claim, as is often done, that the act of the child is more physiological and of the adult more psychological. An act of will, whether in animal, child, or man, can be described in both mental and neural terms, and it is doubtful if the effort of a baby of one month to turn the head and hold the eyes upon a bright splotch of light is more "physiological" than is the act of a Newton to solve the relation of the moon and earth. Both are wholly conditioned by neural processes, and both are mental acts.

Whether the will of a child is of a piece with the world-will after the manner of Schopenhauer, or is identical with the will to live of animal and plant kingdoms and with the persistence of species is a question for philosophy; but in its psychological aspects it has its setting among organic traits and temperamental peculiarities that are native to the individual. Its marks are the tight fists of the tiny infant, the precise, vigorous movements of its limbs, the demand for food accompanied by appropriate crying tones emphasized by kicking and twisting, the persistence it shows in turning the head or bending the body to keep its eyes upon mother or nurse or other desired object, and its obstinacy in gaining any of its ends. It is not unlikely that the strength of will during the earliest weeks is a fair index of its strength in later years.

2. A true *sense of self* is often regarded as belonging to later years and not to little children. This notion has arisen from an artificial separation of the abstracted ideational self and the instinctive self-feeling. It is usually not until the teens that an abstract conception of the self is possible, and not until later can one distinguish an abso-

lute *ego* of which the different states and processes are a modification. The sense of self is no less intense, however, in those experiences so common earlier than the teens, as G. Stanley Hall has shown, when the insistent questionings arise in the child's mind of whence he came, why he is here, what he would be had his father and mother not been themselves, and the like. Still earlier evidences of a vivid sense of self are found in the craving for approbation, the pleasure in pretty clothing and in self-adornment, the pride and vanity, and the demand for their own rights of even very young children. Indeed the self-feeling will never be stronger than during the fourth and fifth year. Without hazarding the psychologist's fallacy of reading states of consciousness into new-born children, there is no danger in asserting the presence of a highly developed self-feeling during the second half of the first year. It is betrayed behind such facts as the child's sense of ownership of its own toys, chair, or crib, its resentfulness at interference with its wishes, its persistent wish to feed or otherwise help itself, and in manipulation of blocks, rattling of keys, tearing of papers, and the like. Many such acts arise in "the feeling of its own power generated by the movements originated by the child himself, and in the proud sense of being a cause."

Preyer who several years ago set the pattern for the thinking on the genesis of the sense of self, made a faulty analysis of its beginnings, which has been generally repeated since. His data were derived chiefly from the child's treatment of the parts of its own body, its behavior before a mirror and in the use of the first personal pronoun. During the first and the early part of the second years he observes and handles the parts of his body precisely as if they were objects and not parts of himself. This fact is interpreted to mean the absence of a self-consciousness. In learning to distinguish his members from other things, there "arises the definite separation of object and subject in the child's intellect. In the beginning the child is new to himself, namely, to the representational apparatus that gets its development only after birth; later, after he has become acquainted with himself, after he, namely, his body, has lost the charm of its novelty for him, i. e., for the representational apparatus in his brain, a dim feeling of the 'I' exists, and by means of further abstraction the concept of the 'I' is formed." It will be noticed that the separation of subject and object is a problem for the "intellect," and that Preyer identifies the sense of self with the I-"concept," or with the "representational apparatus in the brain." This, again, is inconsistent with a developmental psychology, and to hold such a view the author must make a sharp distinction between the lower nerve-centers and the representational centers in the brain. This he proceeds to do. Because the new-born baby reacts consistently as an individual and can "suck, cry, move the limbs, and feel," he believes there is a spinal-marrow *ego* and an *ego* of the brain which "are absolutely isolated from each other." "When a normal babe plays with its feet or bites itself in the arm as it would bite a biscuit, we have in this a proof that the brain with its perceptive apparatus is independent of the spinal-marrow." The point to observe is that the "spinal-marrow *ego*-consciousness" in its development constantly comes upon new phenomena that must be assimilated, and its blunders and awkwardness in the act of assimilation are due to the newness and strangeness of the experiences, and not to the lack of a sense of self. As well say that the curious interest of a youth in his newly started mustache were the sign of the growth of a higher representational self which is "absolutely isolated" from his lower *ego*. It is conceivable that a fully matured man, if he had lived in a world otherwise similar to the present, but without experiences of reflecting mediums, would betray the same naïveté in grasping the relationship between himself and his reflected image as does the infant. The aspects of self-consciousness throughout from the earliest probably form an entire continuum, and each higher phase is a mere blossoming out of a lower. The mastery of the first personal pronoun, which we may safely assume was wrongly used in the third person out of imitation of parents, is a mere incident in learning to handle a new tool, the use of language. If this point of view of continuity of the sense of self is true, the question then of how the *ego* can be an aggregate of sense-experiences and sensation-complexes does not exist, for the self, in so far as we know it in its psychological manifestations, presents a unitary appearance from the outset.

3. The ability to *reason* is often supposed to be the true differentiation between animal and human, children and adults. One of the useful definitions of reason is, somewhat after the manner of James,

the employment of a means in securing an end. This specifies most tersely the nature of the perfected reasoning process. There is invariably an ulterior end that is sought and the premises or data used are hunted out as convenient stepping-stones for arriving at the desired result. This definition brings reasoning in line with the behavior of little children. Kirkpatrick, after describing accurately the steps in the growth of the complex act, says rightly: "Reasoning is first instinctive, sensory, and practical, then conscious, imaginative, and individual, and finally abstract, analytic, and general." A few instances will serve to indicate the quality of reasoning in some of its earlier stages. When the little boy, R., was four months old, he was playing one day on the floor surrounded by his toys. One toy rolled away beyond his reach. He seized a clothes-pin and used it as a "rake" with which to draw the toy within reach of his hand. Mr. Darwin laid his finger within the palm of his child five months old. The child closed his fingers around it and carried it to his mouth. When he found he was hindered from sucking it by his own fingers getting in the way, he loosened his hold and took a new hold farther down, then vigorously sucked the finger (Tracy). Children early learn that crying will bring sympathy and that feigned good cheer or affection will ward off punishment. The skill displayed in adapting means to ends through an intermediate step in these ways is an indication that this procedure fills a large place in the consciousness of small children. It is not to be contrasted in kind with the more complicated acts of the scientist.

4. The minor processes presupposed in reasoning—discrimination, memory and association, judgment, etc., can all be readily observed in the child's consciousness, whether or not they combine into a specific act of reasoning. Discrimination, which Romanes calls one of the root-principles of mind, does not belong simply to the thought life of a highly developed intellect, but is found in even as refined a form among plants and protoplasmic organisms. Darwin noticed that the tentacles of the Drosera, which close around their prey like the tenacles of a sea-anemone, will not respond to the violent stimulation supplied by a raindrop falling upon their sensitive surfaces or glands, while they will respond to an inconceivably slight stimulus of the kind caused by an exceedingly minute particle of solid matter

exerting by gravity a continuous pressure upon the surfaces. The pressure exerted by a particle of hair, supported by a dense fluid, that could hardly have equalled the millionth of a grain excited them sufficiently to make them close (Romanes). On the contrary the Venus-fly-trap, which closes upon its prey with the suddenness of a spring trap, has a corresponding delicacy of response to impact, but will not respond to pressure. Each kind of plant has that within it which distinguishes or discriminates its own proper stimulus. A like sensitivity and fineness of discrimination is noticeable in many ways in babies. I have observed, for example, that a child of one year could select just by touch, with marvelous quickness, its favorite block which was placed amidst and under a box full of other blocks so nearly like its own that the coarser hand of an adult could hardly distinguish them.

One must assume also that memory and association are present wherever consciousness exists. With this view we have become sufficiently familiar since the rise of English associationism. The process is present unmistakably and continually in children's minds as well as in adults who try to think tersely. A boy of fourteen months was observed to feel his own ears and then his mother's, one day while looking at pictures of rabbits(Tracy). Mrs. Hall's child, by three months, had learned that the sight of his bonnet was a sign that he would be taken out for a ride and greeted it with joy.

The catalogue of common characteristics of the minds of children and of mature persons is already sufficiently extended to have indicated, from several standpoints, the fact that, in respect to "root-principles" or essential qualities of consciousness, no new ones make their appearance. In what, then, consists the difference in the nature of consciousness at the two extremes of its development? A list of a few of the contrasts will lead us still farther into an understanding of the nature of child-consciousness and how it grows.

*a*) I should be expected to mention the presence or absence of instincts as one of the chief points of differentiation. This distinction seems more specious than real. The child has a number of instincts at first, each showing itself simply by some appropriate expression. These soon become so interlaced that the presence of each is blurred by the rest. Very soon they also become hidden by the growth of self-consciousness and perception by which instinct passes over into impulse, desire, and aspiration. It is probably nearer the truth to say, as have Romanes and James, that men are possessed of a greater number of instincts than are animals and children.

A real distinction is in the degree of complexity at the two extremes. The mental life of the child is relatively simple. The hereditary strains within it have been sparingly chosen in the course of evolution, and even then the child at birth is on a level with a type of life far lower in the scale of development than his own species, a type which is much simpler than the complex life of the highest mammalia. A convenient analogy to show this difference is found in the nervous system. In the new-born child, while the spinal cord and lower nerve centers are fairly developed and can control the elementary sensory and motor reflexes and the organic functions, the cerebrum is entirely undeveloped. This will afterward consist of several million nerve elements all of which will, presumably, enter into the wonderfully complicated mentality of the mature person.

*b*) A second difference is but a phase of the last, viz., the remoteness of many of the stimuli to which the adult consciousness responds. They may be remote in time, as when a study of history or archaeology becomes a real factor in the present, or when ideals seem to lead away years or ages in the future. They may be remote in place as when a civilized man feels the pulse of the nations outside his own in distant parts of the earth, or when by the help of telescope, spectroscope, and laws of science he feels himself a citizen of the stellar universe.

*c*) There is, again, a constant transition from earliest childhood in the nature of the objects of consciousness. This is close akin to the last point, in that it amounts, essentially, to a widening of the range of consciousness. There has taken place constantly the rich differentiation within the mental life which has given rise to the various senses and then within each of the senses until at present the world has assumed the aspect of an indefinite variety of parts and qualities. The method of consciousness in handling its data, whether its range be still narrow or widely extended, is the same.

It is sometimes claimed, for example, that there is a growth from childhood on, in the power of focalization of consciousness upon a specific object. This is an error arising from judging the power of concentration of child and adult upon the same objects which are still outside the horizon of the child. A child cannot focalize upon a problem in mechanics, but it can upon a simpler problem within its reach: as when a child was observed to remove and replace the lid of a can more than seventy times without stopping and that with constant interest and attention. The amœba digesting its food, the cat watching for a mouse, the babe nursing, the child surrendering himself to the continued fever of a newly learned game, are acts of concentration altogether similar to that of a scientist who devotes hours or days to some technical detail.

*d*) The most important change, perhaps, that occurs in the growth from childhood consciousness is the growth in self-consciousness. I mean, not the feeling of selfhood spoken of earlier, but the increasing power that states and processes seem to acquire to represent themselves to themselves, or, in other words to appreciate their own inner quality. At first they are "subliminal" and later tend to become states of clear consciousness, the differential mark of which is their degree of self-consciousness. The will and feeling of selfhood are originally, while well organized and insistent, subjective and unreflective. They later develop into self-conscious volition in the one case and, in the other, a self-directing *ego* with a conscious purpose.

The outcome of the discussion up to the present point is that the mental life in its development from childhood on is a continuum. There are no gaps and breaks. The divergent lines that run through the constantly widening range of child-consciousness are continuous with those of mature life. There are, however, vital differences. Our chief concern, in this article, has been to try to see accurately some things that are true in regard to child nature. They may serve us, later, in the greatest of human interests, child culture.